

The Moravian Mission Machine (Christian Documentary)

by Dean Taylor

The Moravian Mission was a remarkable example of how unity, prayer, and sacrifice can lead to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the spread of Christianity to the ends of the earth.

Duration: 1:06:35

Scripture: Acts 2:42, Colossians 3:23

Topics: "Missions", "Discipleship"

Description

This sermon delves into the remarkable history of the Moravian mission outpost in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, focusing on their radical dedication to spreading the gospel globally. It highlights their communal living, sacrificial lifestyle, commitment to prayer, and unity in purpose, challenging listeners to consider the depth of their own faith and dedication to God's work.

Transcript

Not far up the road from me in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, are the remains of a Moravian mission outpost from the 1700s. A few years ago when I was doing some research on early Moravian missions, I stumbled upon this part of history and it amazed me. As I went to do some more study of this history, the more I would dig into this history, the more I studied them, the more exciting this whole thing got.

As soon as I stepped foot in the old cemetery in Bethlehem, aptly named God's Acre, I noticed that right here among the stones of the founding members, famous missionaries of the time, are dispersed all through here the names of many American Indians. But one stone really caught my attention. It simply says, Joseph of Mohican, departed July 21st, 1746.

It caught my attention because it's so simply put. But what a story. At the time, each stone seemed to conceal a treasure trove of untold mission stories, all seemingly locked between the dusty pages of time.

Eager to know more, I dug deeper, and what I discovered was just how effective this often overlooked mission outpost actually was. Between this humble little community in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, and their sister community in Herrnhut, Germany, their mission activities spanned an amazing distance, four continents in under 14 years. What's more, their converts were successfully disciplined and trained, many of them going on to become pastors and missionaries themselves.

I was impressed when I read this, but when I stopped to consider the conditions of the time in which they lived, I was simply astounded. Think about it. No modern transportation, no modern communications such as the internet, email, cell phones, etc.

No hospitals, no antibiotics, no developed even postal system. Indeed, I found myself smack dab in the biggest treasure trove of mission history that I ever have read before. I knew this had to be the work of God, and I knew that I needed to know and learn more about it.

Forged in the kilns of centuries of revival fires, Moravia, located in modern-day Czech Republic, was a melting pot of radical Christianity for over a millennium. From the Cathari, Bogomils, Albigensians, and Waldensians, to the Hussites, the Hutterites, the Czech Brethren, now called the Unitas Fratrum at this time, this area gave birth to a heritage of radical Christianity like no other. But in the 1700s, a new wave of Catholic persecution came upon the non-Catholic church all over Moravia.

As a result, many recanted, and some grew cold. Those who refused to recant were severely persecuted. Then in 1722, a small remnant of that Unitas Fratrum, that unity of the brethren, felt the Lord urging them to flee to nearby Germany.

Once in Germany, they ended up on the property of a young, newly married count named Ludwig von Zinzendorf. Ludwig had a deep desire to follow Christ in a radical way. As Moravians moved onto his property, he developed a relationship with them.

Ultimately, Ludwig was so moved by their devotion to Christ and their godly example that he soon joined them. Together, they propelled one another on to greater devotion. Eventually, God would bless them with something truly extraordinary.

Not long after the first group of refugees settled in Hernhut, Christian David, who was one of the original Moravian leaders, had a longing to invite more of his fellow brethren back in Moravia to escape that Catholic-controlled country and come to Hernhut. Subsequently, in August of 1723, he returned to Hernhut with many new believers. However, rapid growth had its predictable effect, and substantiality stressed the little community.

Instead of this ideal retreat for the spiritually inclined, the surrounding area, lying as it did right there between the borders of Cilicia and Bohemia, became a raw refugee camp. There were all kinds of Christians showing up. Schweckwelders, Anabaptists, Lutherans, Calvinists, and more.

Desiring to be more intimately involved with what was going on in Hernhut, Ludwig and his wife eventually moved in with the refugees. Living there with all those radicals was pretty tough at times. The contention, the division of all the different views and perspectives wore on that new community.

There's even a report of someone walking up and down Hernhut shouting, Zinzendorf is the Antichrist. Things were tough in these early times. But what they did next may seem like a small point, and so because of that it's often overlooked.

But I would like to take a moment and just focus a little bit on the next thing that the Moravians did as they head towards revival. The thing that they did was repent for their lack of unity. They started to focus on the things that they agreed on instead of all the various different things they disagreed on.

And with this unity, God began to speak to them in a powerful way. It's actually a biblical principle that's often overlooked. You know, in John 17, Jesus prayed.

He said, And He says He wants that oneness to be just like the Father and the Son are one. And then on that He says, In the book of Acts, I was just listening to a sermon about the book of Acts and the way the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost. It was a sermon, an old sermon, by A.W. Tozer.

And in this sermon, he brings out this very point, this very biblical principle that I think really benefited the early Moravians. And in that sermon, A.W. Tozer talks about that if you look at the book of Acts, you'll see that they first were a unified people. Then the Holy Spirit came upon them.

It's the same thing that we hear back in the Psalm 133 when it says, Listen to this little segment of the sermon from A.W. Tozer on this point. This text shows, as the rest of the Bible will confirm, that unity of mind on the part of the people of God precedes the blessing. The Holy Ghost comes because we are a united people.

He does not come to make us a united people. If you will look at the book of Acts, you will find in the 2nd chapter that when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as if a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.

And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them, and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost. And then a few months later they prayed again, and when they had prayed, the place was shaken. This is in the 4th chapter, where they were assembled together, and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost.

And they spake the word of God with boldness. And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul. Neither said any of them that aught of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had all things common.

Now the assumption is they had been like that right along. They didn't get that way because the place was shaken where they were assembled. The place was shaken where they were assembled, and they were all filled because they had been that way.

And it doesn't say the multitude of them became of one heart, it said the multitude of them that believed were of one heart. And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. Now this teaches us that unity is necessary for the outpouring of the Spirit of God.

The Moravian refugees had come from a church heritage that believed that the Holy Spirit could lead the church in both spiritual and practical matters. As Christ's witnesses on this earth, they believed that when they, that is when Christ's church met together to pray, the Spirit would lead them to unity in just about every matter. In May of 1727, with the help of the settlers from Moravia, Ludwig drew up a plan of brotherly agreement.

He called it a brotherly agreement. This agreement gave the growing community some needed expectations and boundaries. Then following their ancient custom, the people of Hernhut chose four men to be their overseers.

Christian David, George and Milkor Nishman, and Christoph Hoffman. Then on May 12, 1727, they all signed their names and shook hands, promising to keep the rules and Christ's peace. This was a time of radical, and at times even painful, transparency and honesty.

And after God worked in them that spiritual unity, they began to meet to take that unity to another level. Quickly sensing the unrest that they found there, Ludwig and his wife devised a plan of an accountability group. They formed everyone from as small as groups of three to groups of six.

These groups would share their sins, share their struggles, share very personal things with one another. And it was a very important time for this little community of being real before God and before each other. Zinzendorf wrote in his journal about one of these accountability meetings, saying this, David Nishman and Christian David sat at my table today.

We took stock of ourselves and told each other what still remained to mar the image of Christ in us. First I let them say what was the matter with me. Then I said what was still the matter with them.

With this kind of sincerity and honesty, a genuine unity started to emerge. And it was with this heart of unity that they began to call upon God in prayer. The historical account of the prayer life of these people is tremendously challenging.

On one such account, it reads like this, quote, On July 16th, the count poured out his soul in a prayer accompanied with a flood of tears. This prayer produced an extraordinary effect. The whole community began praying as never before.

On the 22nd of July, many of the community covenanted together on their own accord to meet often to pour out their hearts in prayer and in hymns, end quote. Another entry, quote, On August 5th, the count spent the whole night in prayer with about 12 or 14 others following a large meeting for prayer at midnight where great emotion prevailed. On Sunday the 10th of August, Pastor Roth, while leading the service at Hearn Hood, was overwhelmed by the power of the Lord about noon.

He sank down into the dust before God. So did the whole congregation. They continued till midnight in prayer and singing, weeping and praying, end quote.

The Lord had blessed them with unity in practical matters and in prayer. But then after those accomplishments, on August 13th, 1727, Zinzendorf called for a special communion service. During this service, God poured out a special blessing on them.

One person who was there reported it this way, quote, No one present could tell exactly what happened on that Wednesday morning, August 13th, 1727, at the specially called communion service. They hardly knew if they had been on earth or in heaven, end quote. Another account of that morning put it this way, Loud weepings and cries to heaven nearly drowned out the singing.

The service did not end until, as Lydvig described it later, until we had true herzogemeinschaft, the communion of the heart. He described it this way that they experienced that upon them all. When they had been one body before, now they were one in spirit, the spirit of Christ.

Those who had seriously annoyed each other now embraced and promised to serve one another in peace. So the whole congregation came back to herrnhut as newborn children, end quote. Following the communion service, their prayer meetings did not stop, but increased in both commitment and fervency.

One historian records the beginning of this famed nonstop prayer chain of the Moravians. It's beautiful, but very simple. While there's nothing dramatic about the account, it does give us a glimpse of the simplicity of the spirit behind this prayer burden.

He put it this way, quote, The thought struck some brethren and sisters that it might be well to set apart certain hours for the purpose of prayer, at which seasons all might be reminded of its excellency and be induced by the promises annexed to fervent, persevering prayer to pour out their hearts before the Lord, end quote. So it was that on the 26th of August, 24 men and 24 women covenanted themselves together to continue praying in intervals of one hour each day, day and night, each hour allocated by lots to different people. On August 27th, this new regulation officially began.

Others joined the intercessors, and the number involved increased to 77. They all carefully observed the hour which had been appointed for them. The intercessors had a weekly meeting where prayer needs were given to them.

The children, also touched powerfully by God, began a similar plan among themselves. It is reported that those who heard their infant supplications were deeply moved. The children's prayers and supplications had a powerful effect on the whole community.

And they prayed. Here I am actually in Heron Hood. Right in front of God's acre was a tower.

And on this tower, the saints of God would pray here around the clock, continually interceding for all the lost souls and the things that were happening in Heron Hood, the things that were happening across the ocean. And even from this place, you can see the kind of view of the saints that prayed here. And it's encouraging.

And the whole thing started kind of small. Some people got together and said, Hey, why don't we just take different hours and continue to pray around the clock? And it caught on. And it began to be something that was special about the Moravians.

As a matter of fact, the story is that this prayer meeting lasted for a hundred years. When I went to Bethlehem looking in the archives, one of the things I really wanted to see is proof of that prayer. And when I was looking through the diaries, I saw in there the actual list of the people that were on the list of what times they were praying.

I'm very encouraged about this. And when I think of all the things I've tried to accomplish in my life without prayer, I'm reminded again and again, it must be made in prayer. It must be wrought in prayer.

And so I just really impressed when I read about the Moravians' history and their prayer life right from this spot and what they did around the world. The Moravians felt that the call to nonstop prayer was likened to the Old Testament typology of the fire in the temple, where in Leviticus 6.13, it says, quote, the sacred fire was never permitted to go out on the altar, end quote. Likewise, they said that, quote, a congregation is a temple of the living God, wherein he has his altar and fire.

The intercession of his saints should incessantly rise up to him, end quote. It is said that this prayer meeting continued unbroken for 100 years. Also, young people should note here that this prayer watch was started by a group of young, zealous believers.

The average age of people in this community was about 30. Zinzendorf himself was only 27. If the revival would have stopped there, I would have been impressed enough.

But as I kept reading and studying these people, I found that what happened next was even more extraordinary. Sadly, it's this next part that you never hear about in the typical accounts of the Moravians, and for good reason. Nothing about what happened next fits into our modern American idea of what we call normal church life.

A bit of a disclaimer. Since most of the Moravians were poor refugees, they had a few advantages over us. They were already strangers and pilgrims in their new land.

Because of this, they had very few attachments to their surroundings. They also, because of their great poverty, they had to depend on one another for even their most basic needs. With all this, these Moravian pilgrims were poised and ready to be led anywhere the Lamb would lead them.

It was in those early days that their model became, the Lamb has conquered, let us follow Him. As they kept praying and asking God for more, it wasn't long until the Holy Spirit put them into the action. They felt the Holy Spirit pressing on them to spread the kingdom of Jesus to the ends of the earth.

The first two missionaries that they put into action were two young Moravian missionaries named Leonard Dover and David Mitchman. They sent them to the island of St. Thomas. Their dedication was incredible.

And wanting to win these souls, these two young Moravian missionaries were willing to sell themselves into slavery to reach the slaves on St. Thomas. They actually weren't allowed that because they were white. But they still found ways to get into St. Thomas to be able to minister to these natives there on that island.

These missionaries ministered in some of the worst conditions you could imagine. Not long into the work, David Mitchman returned to Hernhut and later was made the first bishop of the renewed Moravian brethren. In a few years, Leonard would also be called to return to Hernhut to be involved in ministry in Europe until his death.

The work in St. Thomas continued to grow rapidly as others came to feel the need. Eventually, David Mitchman would lead the mission community to Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, where he is now buried right there in God's acre in Bethlehem. Lots of young people today talk about being a missionary.

The requirements of being a missionary with these Moravians, however, was very impressive. The requirement to be one of these missionaries was nothing short of total surrender. In one interesting account, a young couple who wanted to be missionaries to St. Thomas were questioned about their desire to be missionaries.

The wife was called before the conference and the following questions were asked. This is what they asked this lady, standing there by herself without her husband. Quote, Had she lived long enough for herself? Her answer, She had lived for herself long enough.

Next question, Had she lived long enough for the church? Answer, She did not know. Had she the courage to die for this? Answer, She had the courage and the joy to do this. End quote.

Next, her husband was asked the same questions at a later time, separately, away from her. When they asked him if he had lived long enough for himself, he said that he had not. He also said that he was uncertain whether he was willing to die in this cause.

Due to his hesitancy, they were both denied the work. Another requirement for those desiring to be missionaries was that they would be married. Many young men took a wife just simply for this reason.

But they had an actual name for these special marriages. They called them, a literal translation meaning, a militant marriage. Once they met all these requirements, their names were given to the lot, where they let the Lord decide if they would be chosen to go into the mission field or not.

So they would put their names into a hat or something, and then by lot, they would be described if they were going to go into the mission field. Everything totally surrendered to God, waiting for Him to choose. Obviously, these missions were very costly.

But the brethren back home did not only feel like they were laboring with the missionaries on the field, they actually were. While the missionaries were living out very sacrificial lives in foreign countries, those back home didn't feel it was right for them just to go on living to themselves. In a short amount of time, everyone back at Hearnhut was living sacrificially.

They began to think of ways that they could be more productive. They began to have housing areas where people could live more collectively and began to look at their jobs and things that they could do to propagate the gospel a little bit more. Those little accountability groups grew into shared living quarters and shared working groups.

Ultimately, they shared their lives together, their prayers together, and they even shared their stuff. This kind of sacrifice is hard to imagine in our day and age. I can remember oftentimes a missionary coming to our church and preaching that if our church back home would live as sacrificially as they did in the field, then a lot more could be done for the spreading of the gospel.

I often thought, well, if any of us would actually do that, it would be radical. After reading the history of these Moravians, I thought if ever an entire church would do that, as they did here, it literally becomes invincible. The way that the missionaries kept in touch with their brethren back home was also impressive.

To keep in touch with those back home, the missionaries kept detailed journals of their travel and progress. They kept one copy for themselves, one copy they sent to Hearnhut, and later on they also made another copy and sent it to Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. When I was there at the vault in Bethlehem, I actually saw hundreds of these missionary journals.

Most all of them aren't even translated yet. This is the way it worked. In the evenings, at the completions of their 12 to 16 hour work day, the home community, like back at Hearnhut, would all go to their nightly prayer meeting, and there they would read a copy of the journals.

They'd hear about the struggles, the successes, and they would feel part of that. This kept them connected to the work. I think about that it must have made that 16 hours of slopping the hog or cutting trees feel a lot better, knowing that what you were doing was all for the propagation of the gospel and for the kingdom of God.

And it worked. When the mission reports started coming in about the different missionary activities and the success that they were having on the mission field, they began to do more things. They began to buy ships, and with those ships began to carry the gospel even further to the ends of the earth.

With all this vision and growth, they began to think of something even more radical, a total mission community, an outpost where they could begin to take the gospel even further. By 1735, they had the idea to first try this missionary outpost community in Georgia. And so they got the things together to begin to have this huge undertaking of taking this entire community to Georgia.

And we have this incredible little glimpse of what these men and women and children were like given to us by a journal entry in the famous John Wesley as a young Anglican priest when he was heading to America as a missionary. In that journal, John Wesley records about when the ship came into a hurricane and the way everybody behaves. Here's what John Wesley wrote.

Speaking on the Moravians, In the midst of the Psalms, wherewith their service began, the sea broke over, split the main sail in pieces, covered the ship, and poured in between the decks as if the great deep had already swallowed us up. A terrible screaming began among the English. The German Moravians calmly sang on.

I asked one of them afterwards, Were you not afraid? He answered, I thank God, no. I asked, But were not your women and children afraid? He replied mildly, No, our women and children are not afraid to die. After they had landed safely in America, the Moravians rebuked the young John Wesley for his lack of faith and therefore questioned his salvation.

Wesley then asked Bishop Spangenberg about the Moravians' faith. The bishop took it as an opportunity to ask John Wesley some hard questions about his faith. Here's the way Wesley reported it in his journal.

He said, My brother, I must first ask you one or two questions. Have you the witness within yourself? Does the Spirit of God bear witness with your spirit that you are a child of God? I was surprised and knew not what to answer. He observed it and asked, Do you know Jesus Christ? I paused and said, I know he is the Savior of the world.

True, he replied, But do you know he has saved you? I answered, I hope he has died to save me. He only added, Do you know yourself? I said, I do, but I fear they were vain words. Not long in Georgia, the Spanish started to make war against the British.

Because of the Moravian non-resistant stand of loving their enemies, they felt it best to cut their losses and headed north to Pennsylvania. Some of the brethren had already been working in Nazareth, Pennsylvania, helping George Whitefield build a school for African-American children. However, not long after they were there, they got into a disagreement with Whitefield over the doctrine of predestination.

Whitefield ended up firing the Moravian brethren because of their belief in free will. Once released, the brothers found a plot of land that they felt would be perfect for their mission outpost. So it finally happened.

On Christmas Eve, 1741, Count Zinzendorf and a band of pilgrims met here in a small little house and consecrated themselves and the community to total dedication to God. Right from the start, this little community was baptized with a laser-sharp vision, purpose, and dedication. What made this community different? One of the secrets for their unprecedented success at Bethlehem was due to their idea of a pilgrim community.

You see, a year before the founding of Bethlehem, Zinzendorf was forced off his own property in Saxony by the local government. But never losing an opportunity, Zinzendorf levered this setback to design something powerful. Zinzendorf actually started a traveling mission community that he called the Pilgrim Gemeinde, or the Pilgrim Community.

He said that it should be a, quote, school of prophets that moved like a blessed cloud as the wind of the Lord pushes it and makes everything fruitful, end quote. Well, a year later at Bethlehem, this vision came to fruition. This pilgrim spirit is what shaped Bethlehem.

When I stop to consider my own life, I have to be honest, I think of the Starbucks coffee houses and the various restaurants that I have frequented along my little mission trips and preaching engagements. I've got to confess, I feel pretty sheepish reading about their journeys and their dedication. Even when this pilgrim community was sailing on the way to America, they conducted themselves like a military fleet prepared for war.

Listen to this account that I found on just how life was like on that ship as they went from this community in Germany on their way to America. I found a glimpse into this dedicated lifestyle of these missionaries from a letter, which is now at the Bethlehem Archive, and it gives kind of the details of what their life was like. Here's the letter.

On board ship, daily text were read and meditated upon at their morning and evening devotion. The night watch and hourly intercession was observed. One whole day was set aside as a day of prayer and thanksgiving.

Love feasts were frequently observed. Regular times were set apart in these floating congregations for worship, and regularity and promptness were meticulously observed. At six o'clock in the morning came the call to arise, wash, and dress.

At seven was the morning blessing. At eight, breakfast. For nine to twelve, the English brethren studied the German language and the Germans the English.

At twelve, the noon meal. The afternoon was spent in some useful occupation such as spinning, sewing, mess duties, and making hammocks. At six, the evening meal.

At seven, song services, one in German and others in English. At nine, a conference of the officers, class leaders, and supervisors. And at ten, the night prayer watch began, continuing until 6 a.m. These night watchmen, working in pairs and hourly shifts, spent their time in prayer and vigil.

The letter continues. The system covering the minutest details was carried out to provide cleanliness, proper decorum, and discipline. Before the sailing of the second sea congregation, Spangenberg, who was in Europe at the time, divided it into six groups.

Three of men and three of women. The women, both married and unmarried, lived on one side of the ship, and all the men on the other. Each person was assigned definite duties.

One struck the hour on a bell. Some were teachers. Others, exhorters.

A health committee was appointed, consisting of a doctor and assistants. Some were chosen as nurses. Other committees were the cooks and his assistants, the steward and his assistants, those who had to

wait on the tables, and finally the ship crew.

All Moravians working under Captain Garrison." Needless to say, when this committed group of believers landed in America, they hit the ground running. Right from the beginning, this group wasn't about to just settle into nominal church life. As a matter of fact, they did just the opposite.

By reading the history, it was as if you were seeing how far each of them could challenge each other, just to see how far they could go. And far they went. Now, what you're about to hear next may shock you, but before I tell you of some of the more radical ways that the Bethlehem Mission community conducted themselves, I should first preface it with a few important facts, or rather some more disclaimers.

First of all, life at Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, was very different than your typical American church today. But nevertheless, the amazing thing about them, the amazing thing about the Moravians, is they did not believe that their way of life was the only way, like they're the one true church or something. That kind of sectarianism was simply not their way of thinking at all.

To be honest, I would even say that to my taste, they were at times a bit too ecumenical. So just please, keep this in mind as you hear about their radical testimony and lifestyle. And then a personal disclaimer.

I have to say that when I first started reading about what church life at Bethlehem was like, I first felt humbled and even a bit ashamed. But then I felt inspired. Inspired about what God could do with the congregation today if it was totally sold out to him in the same way that they were.

The Moravians at Bethlehem knew what they wanted. They wanted to follow the Lamb, and they weren't going to let anything get in their way. I think it was Leonard Ravenhill who once said that in every age, God has given the church the resources and ability to evangelize the whole world if they would just do it.

You know, I used to think that he was just exaggerating, but after reading what these Moravian brethren were willing to sacrifice for the gospel, I began to understand what Ravenhill was talking about. And perhaps the hardest thing for any of us to be willing to sacrifice is our possessions. Out of a burden for the loss and a desire to be used of God as pilgrims and strangers, the brethren of Bethlehem did not feel they had the time to establish their own estates and businesses.

Therefore, just like the early church at Pentecost, they pooled their resources and worked together in community. To them, working as soul winners and missionaries was their entire life and business. People desiring to move into the community had to understand this type of dedication.

The following contract from the Bethlehem archives shows what Moravian newcomers chose to sign and to believe. It's very radical. Here's what the contract that each of these people signed.

Here's what it said. Quote, We all belong to the Savior, as He is Lord. And what we have, that all belongs to Him.

And He will dispose of it as pleases Him. We do not accordingly regard ourselves as menservants or maidservants who serve some man for the sake of wage, and who might demand hire or pay for their labor. But we are here as brethren and sisters who owe themselves to the Savior and for His sake.

We declare, therefore, not only in general, but also in particular, each one for himself, that we do not for this time nor for the future pretend to any wage or have reason to pretend to any. We were received into

this said economy with no idea of having, taking, or seeking wage, the economy having dedicated itself to the service of the Savior, and with no promise that wage or pay should be given. We, on the contrary, regarded a mark of grace that we are here and may labor according to the above stated intention.

End quote. Wow! Now that's commitment. Now keep in mind, as I said earlier, the Moravians did not feel that their way was the only way.

As a matter of fact, even Bishop Spangenberg, speaking about this way of life, said, It is a particular thing and not advisable for all souls. End quote. Nevertheless, after reading this, you kind of have to say, wow.

Furthermore, like the disciplined life they maintained on the ship, the brethren kept looking for more effective ways to arrange their community. They soon combined their housing and their working conditions for ultimate productivity with the sole intent to win more souls. Historian Engel, writing about this arrangement, said, Quote, Because they believed it would be more cost effective than forming many single family homes, the people who built Bethlehem lived in a large communitarian household.

Those who stayed in town pulled their labor for efficiency's sake so that they could maximize the number of pilgrims in the field at any one time. They shared dining rooms, dormitory-style housing, workshops, and ownership of buildings, tools, fields, and pastures, and they relied on their piety to render comprehensible all the sacrifices necessary to build a home in the rugged country of northeastern Pennsylvania. The missionary project thus led to Moravian communalism, the town's most distinctive economic structure, and a deliberate endeavor that maximized profits for the sake of spreading the gospel.

Bethlehem's economy, its communal household, embodied the Moravian devotion to their task, and within it missionary work provided a religious context for even the smallest economic choices. During its 20-year history, it was the base from which grew all other negotiations between the spiritual and the material among Pennsylvania Moravians." Whenever a new mission opportunity came up, they often jumped at the opportunity, but these missions were costly, very costly. Every time they took on one of these missions, it meant more work back here at home in Bethlehem.

The brethren knew that the living conditions in the mission field were often deplorable, so they did not let themselves just live in luxury while they were here in Bethlehem. They believed that their work was a sacred work unto God, and they were able to give that to Him. So that kind of made the 16-hour work days, whether you were in the field or cutting down trees, a lot more enjoyable when you knew what you were doing for God.

To them, whether you were sloughing hogs in Bethlehem or building igloos in Labrador, everybody was a part of the work of what the Lamb of God was doing around the world. Speaking about this unity between the foreign workers and those back home, Bishop Spangenberg wrote the following. Quote, At Bethlehem, the brethren accounted it an honor to chop wood for the Master's sake, and the firemen felt his post as important as it was guarding the Ark of the Covenant.

They mixed the Savior and His blood into their harrowing, their mowing, washing, spinning, in short, into everything. The cattle yard became a temple of grace, which is conducted in a priestly manner. Therefore, in our economy, the spiritual and the physical are as closely united as a man's body and soul, and each has a strong influence upon the other.

As soon as all is not well in a brother's heart, so soon we notice it in his work. But when he is happy in Jesus' wounds and his love to the Lamb is tender, then one notices that immediately in his outward conduct. In another place, Bishop Spangenberg wrote, Each child among us, when it is hardly four years old, spins or picks cotton for the pilgrim, serves the gospel.

End quote. Count Zinzendorf expressed it this way, One does not work only so that one can live, but rather one lives so that one can work. And when one has no work to do, then one suffers or passes away.

End quote. One of my favorite ideas about the Bethlehem community came from my good friend Mike Atna. He and I were visiting Bethlehem, and as we marbled at all the factories and various mills and workshops that were used solely for the propagation of missions, Mike looked at me and exclaimed, Bethlehem was a mission machine.

His quote was the inspiration for the title of this movie. That mission machine mindset really made me think about the way I think about my personal career and life choices. I know that I would like to say that I consider my job and my bank account completely dedicated to the Lamb, but after reading the way the Moravians did it, well, I had to wonder.

Another thing that was very different about the Moravians was just the way they conducted themselves as a brotherhood. They had such a strong sense of membership and unity for the purpose of fulfilling this cause of spreading the gospel of the kingdom throughout the whole earth. Unlike your typical American church plant, the prerequisite to get into the church here at Bethlehem was absolute surrender to the teachings of Jesus Christ.

And also that meant that they allowed the Holy Spirit to work out a true brotherhood amongst them. To do that, it often meant they had to work out a lot of practical things. The Brethren felt this prerequisite was crucial to winning the souls of the Americans of this outpost, both the Indians and the Europeans alike.

They also knew that if they were not single-minded, the work would be hurt. Zinzendorf was jealous to keep this unity and purity. Each person wanting to come to Bethlehem had to be sure that they meant business and that they could support the vision and the community completely.

Speaking at a Brothers meeting only a year after the start of the community, Zinzendorf is already raising the red flag that they were letting people come in and join Bethlehem too easily. The Bethlehem Diary records this following event. Quoting right from the Bethlehem Diary.

Indeed, Brother Ludwig gave the warning that Bethlehem must not be thwarted in its striving for purity. He stated that he was not satisfied with the congregation and that the individual Brethren recently arrived from Europe had not been examined more carefully prior to their having been admitted to the congregation. Brethren who arrived from a distance, even those who had been considered outstanding Brethren and confessors in the congregation from which they respectively came, must be tested, grilled, and dealt with in an impartial manner.

All must depend upon humility and discernment. In this way, a congregation could maintain its purity. All denominations and sects strive to grow larger and stronger, but our rule must remain that of keeping the door open for everyone to leave us, yet of being more cautious in admitting them.

It is to be feared that in time our church may sicken due to its largeness rather than its smallness." Sounds like today's trend of seeker-sensitive churches with all their amusements and enticements wouldn't go

over too well with Count Zinzendorf. What about the standards that the church had? Church standards are a hot topic these days. Questions such as, you know, is it right for a church to have a brotherly agreement about specific things that they feel the Holy Spirit is telling the congregation? Or what do you do if someone does not want to keep the agreement of the brotherhood? If an agreement has lost its meaning, should we keep it or discard it? I was surprised to discover that questions such as these were prevalent in their day as much as it is to ours.

When I first started reading about the Moravians, I found people saying that since they were officially called pietists, they only focused on the inner life and were not particularly concerned about external things. And while it is true that the Moravians did indeed stress the importance of the inner life, to say that they didn't care about externals is dishonest and misses an important aspect of their spirituality. I found that they saw their church more in terms of a Marine Corps than a social club.

To them, everything mattered. At a brother's meeting in Bethlehem, Zinzendorf said this, quote, In a congregation of Jesus, nothing should be done apathetically and by half measures, but everything should go on with constant uniformity and conscientiousness, end quote. No, Moravians were not at all afraid of brotherhood agreements.

However, they also believed that everything was done for a reason. If the standard lost its meaning or its reason for being, they felt that it should be discarded or changed. Zinzendorf, addressing what should be done if standards became empty or meaningless, said at a brother's meeting, quote, As soon as negligence develops, the proper earnestness with which congregation affairs should be treated and the appropriate spirit are lost, and thus their design purpose is not maintained, they had better be dropped and allowed to disappear, or they should be terminated rather than be allowed to continue impaired in this manner.

This is a basic principle of our church, and it keeps it pure. In other denominations, on the contrary, once anything is introduced, it endures in spite of there being neither spirit nor power in it any longer, end quote. What the Moravians had was rare even in their day.

They were able to be radically unified in purpose and design without being judgmental towards others. The Moravian spirit was surprisingly open to other sincere believers. They certainly didn't feel that their brotherly agreements added to their salvation, but as far as their local community was concerned, they felt the Holy Spirit wanted to make a testimony of their unity.

Therefore, they submitted to the Spirit in everything they did. When doing this, they knew that everything must be done in fear and trembling before a God who sees to the heart. Like me, you may be asking, alright, so what kind of things did they feel they wanted the community to represent? Well, here are a few of the things they hammered out in the brothers meeting.

When you read them, remember that it was absolute purpose and dedication they were after. I'll mention only a few here to show how they dared to speak about details, even about clothes. From one of the meetings, they decided they wanted to make a testimony even in the way they dressed.

Here are some things they hammered out about their dress. Number one, the brothers shall not wear any fresh colors, lay down collars or lapels, double-breasted coats, unnecessary pleats, or starched garments. But the one who still has clothes like this is allowed to wear them until they wear out.

Number two, the sisters shall not wear any type of lace or embroidery on their dresses, nor lacy veils. They shall not use sheer materials, fancy headbands, buttons, or ribbons, nor shall they use white yarn to decorate their clothes. They shall not wear white gloves, nor white or colored stockings, colorful caps, or any fresh or bright colors whatsoever.

They shall use no colorful ribbons in their bonnets, but only black or blue ones. Red-striped or blue-printed aprons are to be dyed solid blue on both sides. No printed cotton shall be worn except for winter head coverings where plain brown is allowed, but no multi-colored prints.

Number three, pointed shoes and slippers shall no longer be worn, nor shoes with high heels. Form-fitting or short-sleeved jackets shall not be worn, no ruffled clothing, nor straw hats that cost more than two groschen. Hat bands shall be of uncolored rough linen only.

Cloth printed on a white background shall only have black patterns and no big flowering or flashy designs. I bring this up just to show how these Moravians were willing to dedicate everything to the service of spreading the kingdom to the ends of the earth. The last point of this particular brothers meeting, number four, put the ending point this way.

It said, quote, the one who does not follow this prescribed manner of dressing exactly shall be excluded from the gemay, the community, and should not be surprised if in his stubbornness he does not get included in future activities. End quote. By today's taste, these standards on clothes may seem a bit over the top.

I wonder sometimes how much we've lost as a church in living the radical Christian life. I do find it interesting that even in their day, other groups noticed this Moravian unity and wrote about it. Even John Wesley, speaking late in his life, wrote a surprisingly painful letter anguishing over the fact that he had not led the Methodist societies in this course.

Quoting from his letter, quote, I am distressed. I know not what to do. I see what I might have done once with regard to dress.

In particular, I might have been as firm, and I now see it would have been far better as either the people called Quakers or the Moravian Brethren. I might have said, this is our manner of dress, which we know is both scriptural and rational. If you join with us, you are to dress as we do, but you need not join us unless you please.

But alas, the time is now past, and what I can do now, I cannot tell. End quote. As I mentioned earlier, birth right at the beginning of this Moravian revival was a passion for prayer.

When I started to do my research about Bethlehem, I just had to find out was this prayer meeting true? I was blessed to see that right there in the diaries, the original Bethlehem diaries, right there with the practical things, the practical things of life about their clothing, about all the different things, was an insistence, an absolute insistence on their prayer life. And right there in the diaries, I see chronicled the actual names and the times of their prayer that these warriors kept their watch through the night praying for God's work around the world. As a matter of fact, I saw that in the diaries that this prayer watch was so important that you are not allowed to come to the brother's meeting to discuss church functions unless you are part of this prayer warrior team.

As soon as the brethren set foot in Bethlehem, they began to make plans for evangelism. In addition to their extensive foreign mission outreach, they also didn't believe that the local mission outreach should be neglected. In the diary, the Bethlehem diary records their different categories of evangelists that they had.

They also had a detailed plan of evangelism right from the start. As soon as the brothers and sisters set foot in Bethlehem, they started making plans for evangelism. In addition to their extensive mission forging endeavors, the Moravians also felt that local missions should not be neglected.

The Bethlehem diary records that they had different categories of evangelists, all working at different times and places. The first classification was called fishers. These evangelists were to go into the countryside.

Their job was to win the locals to the Lord, both Indians and others. Next were what was called the rural ministers. They were to go a little further from the home base and were consequently away on a more full-time basis.

Some of these were commissioned to go to specific Indian nations. And finally, they had their famous messengers to the heathens, which took the gospels to the ends of the earth. When they started a new work among the Indians, the Moravians copied the colony pattern established at Bethlehem and Hernhood.

All around the world, little mission communities started popping up. One of the greatest advantages of these communities was that they converted, educated, and disciplined the new converts. Once established in the faith, these little communities continued the pattern and set up their own little mission communities.

Not all of these little native colonies were as communal as Bethlehem, but all of them carried the same Moravian sense of community and common purpose, and they were all devoted to serving the lamb with everything they had. Speaking of the Indians' acceptance of this colony structure, historian Engel wrote, The Delaware and Mohican Indians lived in an extended series of networks that stretched throughout the region. The advent of the Moravian missionaries as a new form of native community thus fit within a pattern already familiar to the Indians.

End quote. And it worked. The mission to the American Indians here in Bethlehem and the surrounding areas proved very successful.

By 1757, there was over 214 American Indians living here in Bethlehem. 82 of those had actually become integrated into the community economy. In addition to the ministry to the Indians, also the Moravians reached many of the European settlers in this area.

Together with the Indians, the European converts, all together growing in discipleship, growing in their relationship with the Lord, they worked as a nation of priests to spread the gospel to the ends of the earth. I marvel at all the people groups and country these little communities were able to reach. After hearing of their successful missions, it made me ask myself, just how serious am I about reaching the lost? If we as churches were as serious as they were, what could we accomplish today? Here are a few of the mission settlements that I was able to identify for this article.

Beginning with the 1730 mission to St. Thomas, the missionaries also reached Greenland in 1732, Africa in 1735, Georgia in 1735, the South African area in 1736, the Gold Coast in 1736, Switzerland in 1740, New York in 1740, England and Connecticut in 1742, South Africa, Wales, Maryland, North Carolina, Jamaica, India by 1760. And that's not all. Countless other scouting trips and short-term ministries were

going on all the time in many other places.

So what happened? About 35 years after Bethlehem was founded, America declared its independence with England. And that early radical dedication to the teachings of Jesus, which made them non-resistant in war, began to be looked at sort of suspiciously from their surrounding neighbor. That loyalty to Jesus began to be suspect as being loyalist with England.

So during that time, they began to get some persecution with their surrounding neighbors. Things with trade and things with their relationship with their neighbors began to not be as good as it used to be. So during that time, some of these non-resistant convictions began to weaken.

Also in time, their previously radical pilgrim way of life made way for a more moderate household model. Eventually, a more moderate or relevant Moravian church evolved. Some felt that this new Moravian church was healthier and more balanced.

They felt it was good that they had shed their extreme practices and rough edges of the past. As for me, when I come here, I can't but help but mourn the loss. I feel that something precious on this earth has been forever lost.

I fear that. They're working on making the place nicer. The old museums are still here.

You see a scattered blue sign telling of a day long ago where a group of pilgrims carved out a heavenly city in the midst of a wilderness. Most of those things are gone now. While I can't say for sure there are no radical individuals there today who might have a similar otherworldly mindset, I can definitely tell you there are no churches in existence today like the ones we've just discussed.

Things are different now. Historian Jacob Sessler closes his history of the Bethlehem Moravians with this thought. Where once the pilgrim congregation went forth, their feet shod for the preparation of the gospel of peace stands today the thriving city of steel.

These grounds, hallowed by the incarnation of the invisible church, have been defiled by the smoke and sordidness of American industry. The rule of Spangenberg has given away to the rule of Schwab. That's a steel-making company.

And Bethlehem through it cherishes its religious origins as the seat of Moravianism now lives on steel. The spirit that prevailed when the foot washing and the kiss of peace were significant symbols has yielded to the principle of competition and mechanical progress necessarily adopted by modern Moravian businessmen. The exclusive brotherhood has lost both its former holiness and its communal regime.

The quiet devotional atmosphere of the old choir houses, still standing, is displaced by the clanging and grinding of the wheels of industry." Actually, even that steel factory now that used to be there in Bethlehem when that historian wrote that book is now just simply ruined. It's been turned now into a sort of place where they play rock concerts and it's just a mass of metal that's been kept as a museum of the once steel making and it's been replaced now by a casino. So if you ever make it to Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, be sure to come here to God's Acre.

When you're here, just pan over and take a look at all these saints that went on before us. The names of godly men, Indian converts, missionaries to other parts of the world. And if you're here, if you can use imagination, I challenge you to do something.

Look over these gravestones all flat on the ground here and look at them as seeds. That's why they called it God's Acre. They actually saw these as seeds of the resurrection.

As a matter of fact, on Resurrection Morning, if you can use your imagination here, the entire community would come to the edges of this graveyard here and all sing to their lamb in anticipation of the day when the church militant and the church triumphant will rise again and singing praises to their God forever and ever and ever. Then find some of the old gravestones of saints like David Nitchman. And then cast your glance across the field and survey all those Indian names.

But don't stop there. Ask yourself the searching question. What's stopping us from doing this today? Isn't God worth it? The Moravians of old thought he was.

I still love that ancient war cry that we hear at the end of Paris Readhead's Ten Shekels and a Shirt. May the land that was slain receive the reward of his suffering. Could it happen again today? If God gives you the faith, pray with me that God could once again put his witness on this earth that a group of people dedicated, zealously living out the words of Jesus could glorify God.

Do it again, Lord. Do it again.
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Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/eQNWCCQbm4bc.mp4>

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